

# The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, November 21. 1691.

Quest. 1. **A** Certain Gentleman in love with a Lady, (who being already married, and a Vertuous Woman) had no means whereby to fulfill his desires on her; wherefore on occasion offer'd him, murders her Husband, and in decent time after courts, and marries her, (she being altogether ignorant of the barbarous Fact.) In process of time he discloses to her, himself to be the Murderer of her former Husband: Query, Whether in this Case she be obliged in Conscience, out of Obedience to the positive Law, the Law of Nature, and the revealed Law of God, to discover him to the Magistrate: forasmuch as if she doth, she breaks her troth given him (who now claims it by as just a Title as her former Husband did) in her Marriage; and if not, she becomes accessory to the Murder her self?

Ans. Perhaps this is as Uncommon a Case as has appear'd upon the Stage for many Ages, and a true Resolution is as nice and tender, as it felt is strange: Whether our Laws can show any President of this Nature we know not, nor dare we our selves pretend to an Exact Judgment, but we shall give our private Opinion, which we desire may not be decisive unless strengthen'd by better Authorities. We believe the Wife is not bound to reveal her first Husbands Murderer: Our Reasons are,

1. Because her Husband that now is, is by the Law of Nature part of her self, and Nature cannot away with the practice of Self-destruction, every thing will defend it self as much as possible, either by opposing or flying away from the Aggressor.

2. Because her own Husband is her self by the Law of the Land, and the Law of the Land obliges no one to condemn himself, altho it punishes such as do.

3. The Secret was committed as a trust, and not on purpose for a discovery, which ought not therefore to be reveal'd, especially since this trust is not vacated by the Obligations above.

If the Murderer of her former Husband had been any Body else, who also had revealed the Secret to her, she ought to have deliver'd 'em up to the Magistrate. 'Tis not long since we had an instance of a Person under great distraction and inquietudes of Conscience about Murdering a Person, who sends for a Neighbour, makes him swear Secrecy to what he should reveal to him, withal adding, that unless he did reveal it, he could not live; the other swore, receives the Secret, and falls under the same Distractions as the Murderer was, who upon his Confession became easie and quiet in his Mind: This second Person who had the Secret, in the midst of Troubles sends for a Divine, and told him the whole, both as to the Murder, and his Oath of Secrecy: the Divine told him, That his Oath (in his Opinion) was void, not so much (as he thought) because it was an unlawful Oath, but because the Hand of God was so manifestly seen in afflicting the Concealers of such a Sin. The Party immediately informs a Justice of Peace of the whole, and the Murderer underwent the Law. The Custom of the Roman Church is such as hides all Secrets of this Nature reveal'd to 'em. — One passage occurs, not a little pertinent to the matter in hand: There comes a Gentleman to a Priest, and amongst other Confessions declares, That he had murder'd the Priests own Brother: The Priest enjoyns him such a penance, and Absolves him. — Some considerable time after, this Gentleman and the Priest walking together over a certain piece of Ground, the Gentleman stop't, saying, 'Twas just in this place that I kill'd your Brother, and buried him. The Priest immediately goes to the Magistrate, and informs him, That passing over such a piece of Ground, such a Gentleman told him, that he had Murder'd his Brother, and Buried him there; the Gentleman was taken up, and being Convicted, upbraided the Priest with perfidiousness and Treachery, contrary to the Obligations of his Cloth,

No, says the Priest, whatever you told me in Confession, I have and will conceal: What you told me out of Confession, is the same as if it had been to another person.

Quest. 2. One desires to know your Judgment, if a Notorious Sinner, that hath lived in private Fornication and Adultery for many Years, and kept up a face of Morality, as going constantly to Church, reproving Sin in others, receiving the Sacrament, kind to his Wife in many or most respects, not giving her much cause to suspect him; carrying it plausible to all; never drunk, but in the best drunken Company; never Swear nor Curse but in great Passion; never much sought opportunity of Whoring, but only when the Whore and opportunity met; never loved them, but always cast them basely off; but at last all came out, he humbled himself to his Wife, made what satisfaction lay in his power to her, many or most of his Faults hath confess'd to her; but shd she may forgive him as to her part, yet she thinks she is not capable to search his Heart, and counsel him in all that is his Duty to God and his Neighbour: Whether it be not his indispensable Duty to confess all his Sin to an able and godly Minister, that may search him thoroughly, and help to discover the plague of his Heart?

Ans. This is a very sad Account, and deliver'd a little too merrily (if true;) for in our Opinion, 'tis impossible but that an abhorrence of such Impieties could have found more resenting expressions of their Nature.

Mr. Foulks in the Account of his Life, &c. (which we wou'd recommend to all secret Sinners for perusal, 'tis printed for Langly Curtis on Ludgate-Hill) gives an Account the nearest this that ever we met, and the unhappy Consequences of it. But to the Question, upon an Enumeration of the Querists Vices, 'tis ask'd, Whether (further than to his Wife) Auricular Confession is not an indispensable Duty in order to a full discovery of the plague of his heart. We answer, that we don't believe it indispensable, but very necessary, for fear a wrong Judgment shou'd be made of the Truth of his Repentance, for we are all naturally partial to our selves, and apt to make too favourable Constructions of our own Cases: He is not a fit Judge of an humbled Soul, that durst abuse and affront the Memory of his Redeemer in the Sacrament, by trampling upon the Blood of the Covenant: Nor is he fit to judge of Sincerity, who has made such a progress in Hypocrisie, that he has not only cheated the World, but himself also. Add to this, the Effects of Drunkenness and Whoredom, in the whole Catalogue of Vices, there is none like these two for depraving of the Judgment, and rendering a person incapable of knowing his own Condition. The Habit of these is called Reprobation, which according to the Original imports a Not-seeing, or blindness of Heart: And if so, the Judgment must needs be false.

Quest. 3. A Friend of mine (soon after Dr. —s promotion) Dreamed as he lay in his Bed a Hand appeared and Descended as from a Cloud, and dropped down a Book by his side, uttering these words to him, Go hear Dr. — and he that believeth shall be saved. It happened, that a while after the Dr. — preached, and my Friend was present when he took his Text, in the 16th. Chapters of St. Mark, and the 16th. Verse, being the very words which my Friend dream'd of six weeks before: And upon remembrance of those words, and his former Dream, is grown much dissatisfied. — This Relation I do really believe to be true, he having told it me the very morning he dream'd thereof. Gentlemen, I desire your Opinion what should occasion such a Dream, and what it may betoken: Your speedy Sentiments hereof may perhaps be an Assistance to my afflicted Friend, and very acceptable to me.

Ans. Dreams generally are the Result of Constitutions, and as some very Ingenious Men have observ'd, are the most infallible way to make a true Estimate of our Tempers, whether Cholerick, Flegmatick, &c. but

we have already spoken upon that Subject: Notwithstanding, that person must own but little Converse either with Books, or Persons that looks upon all Dreams to be Natural, since there are thousands of Instances that will persuade any thinking person to the contrary.

'Tis very probable, (if the Relation is true) that the present Instance is not the Result of Temper; and to suppose that it is not, can be of no ill Consequence nay, it is possible it may have good Effects; there are, some things that we want to be satisfied in, chiefly, whether there were any particular passages in the Sermon which more nearly relate to the Circumstances of the Person that Dream'd? or whether any thing that was spoken did more or less affect him than ordinarily? — Our Answer in short is, that since we are ignorant of many things that might render us better Judges, we can only offer, that a Wise Good Man receives benefit from all Providences, by adapting 'em to the Nature of his own Circumstances, and we hope our Querist will make such use of this, (whether 'tis, or 'tis not an especial Providence,) that he can upon good grounds affirm himself, that it has not left him less virtuous and wise than it found him.

Quest. 4. Mr. John Conyers, Apothecary in Shoe-lane, having lately made a Proposal to the publick, of exposing his Collection of Rarities to such as shall be curious to see them: I desire your Opinion concerning the Proposal, whether it may be of use to the Publick.

Ans. Tho we did not know any thing of Mr. Conyers, intention this way, till our Querist gave us the hint; yet having heretofore seen his Collection our selves, and on this occasion conferr'd with some that are Persons of Judgment; (from whom we are informed, that he hath not only new methodized the things that he then had, but also made very considerable additions to them, so that the whole may appear New even to those who have heretofore seen his Museum,) we may affirm, that it may be many ways useful to the Publick: For the worthy Collector and Keeper of it, hath both with great Industry and Charge, for above thirty years together, made it his business, upon all occasions to procure all such Subjects, either of Nature or Art, that had any thing of Rarity in them, not only in this and the Neighbouring Nations, but even from the most remote parts of the known World; tho' if our Querist think fit to visit the Museum himself, it will give him a juster and fuller Character of it's worth, together with the indefatigable diligence of its Compiler, than so short an Answer as our Method confines us to, can give him. He will there find a vast number of Curiosities, and yet not more observable for their number, and variety, than for their selectness and worth: For Natural things, he will find Exotick Beasts, Birds, and Fishes, Insects, Shells, and Sea productions, Corals, Halcyons, Sea shrubs, &c. Exotick Vegetables, Fruits, &c. Minerals, Metals, Stones, Gems, Petrefactions, &c. in great plenty. For Artificial things, you will find Antiquities very valuable, both Egyptian, Jewish, Grecian, Roman, British, Saxon, Danish, &c. viz. their Deities or Idols, Incense, Amulets, Talismans, ancient Vessels used in Sacrifices, Sepulchral Urns, Lachrymatories, Lamps, Gems, Medals, Coins, Seals, Tesserae, Rings, Keys, Armillae, Sculptures, Models, Fibulae, Stiles, Armour, Shields, Weapons: As also a large Account of New Magnetical Experiments, Philosophical Manuscripts, several Improvements of Heraldry, in Ancient Glass and otherwise; Ancient Manuscript Rolls, and Almanacks, with the Ancient Improvements of Arithmetick of Figures, together with a considerable Improvement of variety of Letters in all the forementioned Languages, as they have been invented in tract of Time; Ancient Books relating to the Laws; Scotch, Irish, and Welch Books of Antiquity, relating to the Laws of Nations, &c. Besides a Collection of Ancient Manuscripts, in the Latin, Chinese, Saxon, Islandish, Muscovite, French, and English Languages, as also Bibles and Testaments both in Manuscript and Ancient Printing. Many whereof are of great Use and Value, old printed Books, &c. Not to mention his Outlandish Garments, Weapons, his Pictures, Prints, and a vast many other things. Now of what use a carefull and observant view of these things may be to the Divine, the Naturalist, Physician, Antiquary, Historian,

or indeed any Person of Curiosity, will not be hard to determine.

The curiosity of Enquirers shall be more fully Answered concerning any of these particulars, if they direct their Questions about this Affair to Smiths Coffee-house in the Stocks Market.

Quest. 5. Suppose A shall make an Agreement with B, who is an Alderman or rich Dealer, which is afterwards put into Writing by the said B, which seeming to A to be according to the Intent of the Agreement, both Parties Sign and Seal it; afterwards B consulting a Cunning Lawyer thereupon, is advised that he may avoid the true intent and meaning of the Agreement in the sense B knew, and the Lawyer also believed in his Conscience that A meant it, and thought B did so too, whatever other mental reservation B might possibly have to himself. A being griev'd sues for relief: But suppose B by his Craft, Power or Purse, shall industriously obtain the Sentence or Decree of the Court in favour of him, greatly to the Wrong and Damage of A — The Question is, Whether according to the revealed Will of God in Scripture B is guilty of the Sin of Defrauding or deceiving his Neighbour? And if so, Whether God Almighty can (according to the Scripture, and the Perfection of his own Nature) Pardon the same upon B's bare Repentance, without Restitution? and whether such Lawyer that shall Advise and Encourage him in such a Suit, be guilty of the like Sin? or what Sin? or whether any or no?

Ans. We have thought it convenient, being desired by a worthy Person to Answer this Question in this Paper, since the determination of the Cause is of great Moment. This Question is already resolv'd in Vol. 3. N. 24. Q. 14. only the first part, which seems to want a satisfaction about the Nature of Reserves and double Meanings in Contracts, is not spoken of. We might urge many fine Morals, but since the matter is of great Moment, we will pass over our own Sentiments, and give one that will abide the Test against all Invasions, 1 Thes. 4. 6. That no Man go beyond or Defraud his Brother in any matter, for the Lord is the Avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned. The Emphasis is plain for the Application of such as deserve it.

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